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TRADE AND COMMERCE,

THE

AUXILIARIES

OF

CIVILISATION AND COMFORT.

PREPARED FOR, AND READ AT THE MEETING OF, THE BRITISH
ASSOCIATION, IN LEEDS, OCT., 1858.

BY

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&c., &c., &c.

MANCHESTER :

A. IRELAND AND CO., PRINTERS BY STEAM POWER, PALL MALL.

1858.

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Now, as of old, industry is the source whence proceed the supplies of the innumerable products of nature, and of manufacturing art. The present age is distinguished not only by an amazing increase in the articles which result from the cultivation of the earth and from the skill of the artisan, but new powers of production having been discovered, augmented supplies of all things necessary to the existence of the human family, as well as of those which can adorn and gratify, now yield their comforts and embellishments, and have consequently called for a correspondingly extended distribution. Happily these beneficial agents, production and distribution, have co-existently contributed to the visible results of modern industry, and this, therefore, is pre-eminently a practical age.

Philosophers, theorists, and inventors have been prolific indicators of improvements; but till Watt and his successors combined the principles of science with the skill of the artisan, and demonstrated by the subjugation of manufacturing difficulties, and by the contrivance of mechanical agents, which became working benefactors, the fruits of knowledge were only first largely partaken of. Stores of learning and of science have smouldered in the libraries of their possessors, great multitudes of people in every country have been subjected to the darkening influences of ignorance, though in slow and certain progress the elements of a new development were advancing; and the test of practical utility now determines the merit of philosophic suggestions,

whilst the emanations of the untaught, whose experience as workmen has led them to invent and improve, are perfected by the superior application of mental skill, guided by true and enduring principles.

Domestic and mere hand labours were the burthens borne alike in every large community, and in the households of the rustic cottage or stately mansion ; the distaff and spindle, producing home-spun woollen or flaxen yarns ; the shuttle with the hand-loom, and the knitting-needle, being the implements employed to supply family wants. About the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the whisperings of intelligence began to tell of magic wonders which water and steam power, with manufacturing appliances to arise from new mechanical contrivances, should produce ; and then opened that remarkable era which called coals and metals from the mines to minister to the formation of a gigantic manufacturing system, when domestic industry was proved to be inadequate to provide for those new wants which increased knowledge and refined desires showed their possessors that they required, and which might be gratified with benefit to extending industry. Manufacturing establishments became signs of progress, employment and consumption equally increased, migration of labourers to districts needing additional hands took place ; wages were more extensively paid, expenditure from enlarged earnings fructified by fostering new demands for the necessities of life, thus widening the foundation on which the new structure of industry should be erected ; and the application of mechanical power having led to a vast increase in all the productions which could contribute to the comforts of life, machinery was proved to be creative and not destructive of beneficial labour.

The rise and progress of the cotton trade will probably best confirm and support these views, which are indeed applicable to every branch of national industry. The growth of cotton is indigenous in those countries which border on the tropical regions. From time immemorial cotton has been grown and manufactured in the East Indies, and no doubt three thousand years ago the Hindoo wore garments, made from this material, not dissimilar to the cotton clothing now supplied from places then unknown,

and where the cotton plant cannot thrive, but which industry and machinery have rendered practically the homes of the greatest modern occupations. Asia and Africa were the earliest fields whence cotton was gathered, and though Turkey in Europe, Spain, the Isles of Greece, and the South of Italy have in the middle ages grown cotton, for the United States of America was reserved its latest introduction, most extended cultivation, and vastly the largest production. Some seventy years ago the seed of cotton was first imported into America and sown, and when its planter beheld with delight his few acres of ground white with the downy harvest, he exclaimed, with foreboding alarm, "This cotton may be made into more stockings than the world needs," yet its value would not exceed £100 ; whilst, since then, in the very short period of its production in that country, so vast has been its increase that £40,000,000 sterling may be estimated as the worth of the last year's yield.

Probably from the most remote ages the arts of spinning and weaving were practised by the human hand. In patriarchal times needlework was highly esteemed ; and in every subsequent period this useful accomplishment has been possessed by women of the highest rank, and by those resident in courts, as also by the squaw of the rude Indian, and by the domestic housewife of every country. But to modern efforts must be attributed, as exemplified in the cotton trade, those enormously large productions of the textile fabrics, whether of the plain and useful or of the fanciful and ornamental, which have placed alike in palaces and cottages comforts and decorations to which the ancients were strangers.

In 1758 the imports of cotton, and its consumption by domestic labour, might be three millions of pounds weight for the entire year ; but in the present year, a century afterwards, the quantity will be one thousand millions, of which the United States of America supply three-fifths, the other two-fifths being obtained from the East Indies, South America, Egypt, and the West Indies. For the last year, by the return made by the Board of Trade, the exports of manufactures in cotton sent to every part of the world amounted to upwards of £39,000,000 sterling ; hence this large sum becomes an agent of payment to a corresponding

extent of imports ; but in thus largely aiding in procuring increased supplies of foreign products, whether in gold, silver, raw materials, food, wines, sugar, fruits, or luxuries of distant growth, which are received into the United Kingdom, there is the satisfaction that our cotton industry has contributed clothing comforts to the benefit alike of the savage and civilised in every region of the earth. In this current year the exports of cotton manufactures will probably amount to £40,000,000, and the value left for home consumption may be £24,000,000, or equal to 17s. per head for the population of this country ; but as the cotton trade of Great Britain is not half its extent in the entire world, including the domestic and semi-domestic manufacture still extensively carried on in the East, the manufacture of the world at large in cotton cannot now be less than the annual value of £140,000,000; and therefore this industry affords to the world's population 3s. worth each of cotton clothing ; or, represented in calico, 14 yards per annum for every man, woman, and child in existence, if nothing but calico were produced. Presuming the cotton industry of this country to amount to £64,000,000 in value for the current year, and the cost of the raw material to be £24,000,000, then the sum remaining for wages, interest of capital, rent, taxes, fuel, freight, carriage, and other requisites will be £40,000,000. The population employed in this trade exceeds half a million, and as for every worker there are estimated to be three members of the family whence the worker comes, who depend upon the single worker for subsistence, 2,000,000 of people are thus supported by it. Engineers, founders, machine makers, and other auxiliary traders, employ vast numbers of well-paid workmen, who are constantly engaged and sustained at the cost of capital invested in the constructive department of the cotton trade ; hence these further sources of support increase the total number of people dependant upon this extraordinary industry. But those mechanical artisans who are not directly visible as spinners and weavers, and whose labours cannot be measured by the immediate production of yarn and cloth, are essentially contributing services of greater importance than either ; and, as capital accumulated by the trade itself, and derived from other channels, has been constantly and progres-

sively in the course of investment, the employment and consequent expenditure of that capital in wages cannot be overlooked, although it does not appear to be recorded in the form of exported or of home-consumed manufactures.

Compared with the world's history, the cotton trade may be regarded as having only existed during a mere atom of time. The inventor of attenuating cotton by rollers, whether Wyatt, Paul, or Arkwright, is unknown; but the latter took out a patent for it, and for spinning upon the throstle, in 1767. Hargreaves, who invented the jenny, by which the attenuation was affected by mere elongation and recession, matured his machine about the same time; and the talented Crompton, whose contribution of the mule gave the greatest impulse to the trade, and whose invention now chiefly fills its vast factories, only effected the alliance of the throstle with the jenny in 1787, when he completed the construction of that machine of immense merit, giving mechanical life to the laborious and beneficial mule, which then entered upon its successful and profitable career. The total number of cotton-spinning spindles in the United Kingdom may be now thirty millions, and in addition there are power looms and other machines in very great numbers, thus warranting an assumption that fifty millions sterling have been invested in the machinery and buildings of this trade in this country alone; and if the capital of the auxiliary trades, as well as that requisite for carrying on this industry, be included, the total capital employed will exceed one hundred millions sterling.

If, however, Watt had not improved the steam engine, and developed the dormant use of mere vapour, a serious barrier to the progress of industry, aided by mechanical inventions, would have remained as a retarding obstacle; but in 1774 he was called from Scotland to Birmingham, where he began the construction of that engine which his partner, Boulton, told George the Third produced the object of the love of kings—power? And as if to feed this infant industry, at this period cotton was first grown in the United States, and thence supplied simultaneously with Crompton's triumphant discovery.

Viewing Lancashire as the chief seat of this industry, if we refer to the population of this county a hundred years ago we

find it to have been 300,000, whilst now it numbers 2,300,000, and this increase is beyond all proportion in excess of any of the old trading and agricultural communities of this or of any other country. The individuals who migrated into this country did not leave behind them happier and better homes than they obtained by the change, they did not vacate places of greater profit, and they did not move from their old and parental abodes to accept from those who were establishing a new industry, either fewer comforts, or lower wages than they had previously enjoyed.

With the new trade of Lancashire, Liverpool became the port for the reception of its raw material and mercantile returns, and for the distribution of the superabundant goods which were produced, and thence shipped to every opening foreign market. Liverpool in 1758, was little more than a bathing and fishing station ; its tonnage was then 100,000, but having grown with the growth of the cotton trade, it employed last year 5,000,000 tons of shipping. The splendour of the docks, filled with ships loading and unloading, of the public buildings, and of the town itself, proclaims Liverpool to be a seaport of no secondary importance, and its attributes establish it as the representative of a vast industry, and the commercial purveyor of necessities and comforts for great numbers of mankind at home and abroad.

Camden relates that the southern and western parts of Lancashire were once a morass, without roads and facilities of communication, its agricultural condition generally being unproductive ; the abodes of the labourers were miserable, and, in addition to natural disadvantages, an expiring feudal system left the people as degraded as they were wretched. This county now, however, happily is filled with flourishing towns ; it is intersected by roads, canals, and railways ; its rivers have the safe conduct of bridges ; its soil is cultivated alike to the advantage of its owners and to the teeming population, which obtain a portion of their food from it ; and its abundant mines supply that indispensable fuel which gives power to the modern engine of propulsion, and thence to the spindle, to the loom, to the locomotive, to the proud steamer which defies wind or wave, and which also warms the hearths of all.

Manchester, as the chief manufacturing city of this county, has advanced in the full ratio of its increasing industry, and with Liverpool and the other portions of the county. In 1758 the population of Manchester and its suburbs did not number 20,000, whilst 500,000 will, at this moment, be no incorrect estimate; and this simple fact must prove the potency of mechanical skill, and the success of manufacturing and mercantile energy there exerted.

Extensive are the ramifications of the manufacture of cotton, and numerous are the places in which it has become the great support of labour. In addition to Lancashire, Cheshire, and Derbyshire, where large spinning and manufacturing concerns exist, there has been established in Scotland a branch of the trade of great importance, and in that portion of the United Kingdom the investments of capital are considerable, and the trade affords profitable employment to multitudes of workpeople in almost every department of its industry. From north to south and from east to west in Great Britain are to be found the seats of this manufacture. In many parts of Yorkshire cotton is spun, but particularly in Bradford, cotton yarns and thread are largely and advantageously blended with the wool of the sheep and the alpaca, jointly producing most useful and beautiful fabrics. Mr. Heathcoat, M.P. for Tiverton, invented and completed the lace machine in 1809, and at Nottingham the lace trade has taken up its abode, whence it extends to Devonshire and the Isle of Wight. Leicestershire possesses the hosiery trade, and thus from place to place cotton has wandered as a benefactor and not as a vagrant, and has been manipulated according to the genius of the people who have seized hold of it, and to the demands and taste of the age.

The beautiful art of printing calicoes and muslins is chiefly conducted in Lancashire, but in Scotland it is also a large and important branch of industry. Probably one eighth of the cotton spun and manufactured in the United Kingdom is devoted to this section of the trade. The workpeople employed in printing are very numerous, and are exceedingly well paid. To the art of printing the cotton trade and the consumers of its manufactures are greatly indebted. No goods produced combine the beauty of

coloured decoration with excellence of fabric at so small a cost, as do printed cottons.

Depending as this country now does upon cotton as an article by which labour and capital are most extensively sustained, as the leading commodity of import and export, as affording more employment than any other material of manufacture, having involved in it the welfare and happiness of greater numbers than any other single industry, and contributing by the payment of direct and indirect taxation most essentially to the national revenue ; may not the question be asked whether this foreign raw material be so efficiently supplied as to prevent those fearful disasters which would arise to the labouring, trading, and mercantile classes, if by storm or tempest, by revolt, or by the calamity of war, this vital element of prosperity could not continue to be procured from its present field of greatest growth ? To the energy of the planters of the United States this industry is more indebted than to the cultivators of land in any other country, yet the States possess only an insignificant portion of ground capable of growing cotton, as compared with the vast tracts of excellent soil in suitable climates which are under the dominion of this country. Beyond the possessions of Great Britain are equally extensive fields, in which cotton could be cultivated and produced. Africa and Asia could grow more cotton than the most sanguine can contemplate the demand of the whole world will ever require, and to extend its production in those two quarters of the globe would be at the same time to extend civilisation, and to diffuse the comforts of life. Work-people, manufacturers, merchants, statesmen, and philanthropists have all the deepest interest in this vital question, but which hitherto has been shrouded in almost fatal apathy.

Cotton, sheep's wool, flax, and silk are alike required in large quantities, to supply the calls of industry, and to contribute to the manufacture of goods, for which the wants of mankind induce them to crave ; and a true benefactor to industry will be who promotes the growth of those raw materials, without an increase of which trade and commerce will languish. But in truth their scarcity and consequent dearness of price will define and limit the extent of manufacturing industry in every branch,

therefore a grave duty devolves upon all who wish prosperity to be perpetuated, and who desire the continuance of well-rewarded labour.

At home and abroad, the wonder is that the British East and West Indies have not supplied the largest portion of the cotton needed in this country ; but the lust of conquest in the rulers of the former dependency, and the prostrate condition of its population, arising from exactions which even few conquered nations have submitted to, have tended to retard the extension of the cultivation of cotton, and of other valuable products, such as its soil and climate would permit to be cultivated with advantage ; and in the latter (the West India Islands), deadly protection misdirected the energies of their planters, and when the legislature emancipated the negroes, no provision was made for the introduction into them of free labour ; wherefore misgovernment is responsible for much of the unproductiveness of those portions of the British empire.

Roused, however, by the salutary influences of public opinion, the legislature of our country has given to the East Indies a new existence. No intermediate spoiler will now prevent the Queen and a direct executive from developing the resources of India. Abounding in the elements of prosperity, the soil, climate, and people, afford pledges of success ; if roads, canals, railways, telegraphs, and the other agencies of progress be introduced ; but, above all, if that beneficent principle by which nations can only advance with enduring certainty be recognised in the administration of pure and untarnished justice, then the future of our 200 millions of fellow-subjects will be identified with their amplest productions and the largest commerce of the world, with civilisation untainted by the errors of superstition and a false philosophy, and our common Christianity will be received and embraced as the triumph of Britain's gracious rule ! An enlightened and just policy applied to every British colony will yield the benefits of an extended commerce, blessing, like charity, those who give and those who receive. Whether at home or in the foreign dependencies of Great Britain, the laws, to be respected and obeyed, must be just ; and no system of polity can be permanent unless the material prosperity and

welfare of the people under it be secured. For a moment contrast the course of industry in Lancashire, the great manufacturing and consuming district of this very cotton, with the East Indies, the country pre-eminently capable of supplying it in overwhelming quantities. From the battle of Plassy, 100 years ago, in the one case, we have witnessed annexation upon annexation, oppression in taxes and rents, roadless and impassable territorial possessions, agriculture retarded, irrigation and public works discountenanced, justice frustrated, Juggernaut and the Suttee long upheld to the perpetuation of superstition, and, finally, this ruling power bore the fruit it had sown the seeds of—mutiny ! and its consequent horrors ! In the other case, Lancashire, during the same period has increased to an untold extent in the value of its land and other property, in the number of its inhabitants, in its service to the state, and it has surmounted difficulties, natural, commercial, and governmental—thereby acquiring prosperity unprecedented.

Of the moral and educational state of the workers in cotton manufactories, it may be asserted that they are less the victims of vice and ignorance than are many of the labouring classes in some semi-domestic and other trades. No doubt the educational qualification which the law requires for children employed in factories is of great benefit to them, but this imperfect system of partial national education is invidious as applied only to children who labour in factories. Could, however, all the children in the United Kingdom derive the instruction afforded to those of them whose destiny places them in mills and manufactories, fewer would be the evils which are identified with ignorance.

On this occasion time cannot be allowed to illustrate by other details the state and progress of the cotton trade ; but the multitudinous advantages which have proceeded from this industry are in truth kindred representations of the benefits which have been derived from the great manufacturing and mercantile organisation of this country. In the manipulations of wool, flax, silk, and of all the metals, are to be found proofs, as important as those claimed for cotton, that the modern manufacturing system, by which the comforts of life are indefinitely increased, is, under a wise Providence, raising the moral, mental, and social

condition of people everywhere, and is placing the necessities and elegancies of life within the grasp of countless classes to whose predecessors such comforts were unknown.

Evidence has now been adduced that the sustaining, clothing, and material comforts of life have been vastly increased, whilst literature, advancing with the age, has contributed to the mental elevation of the whole community. Under the old feudal system of the country the labouring classes had inflicted upon them privations and indignities which now they are happily spared the endurance of; they maintain their personal independence; and where, by mental attainments, industry, frugality, honesty, and perseverance, they strive for fortune and distinction, no hindrance to their advancement exists.

That the improved cultivation of the earth, and mechanical applications to manufactures, have added immeasurably to the ability of all to consume more largely than at any former period of the surrounding plenty created by intelligent industry, none will deny; but if a link in the chain of that comparative plenty which now exists be required, look to the burthens of abundance freighted on the fleets of merchant ships which traverse every sea, and which the wind and wave send as messengers of plenty and of peace to the people of every land. See our shores fringed with the sails of every nation. See our old roads still loaded with the fruits of the earth and of toil; canals, their slow rivals, engaged in the performance of similar labours. Then mark the progress of steam's rapid car, bearing on the railway those precious loads of human life, and that traffic which cannot wait for the locomotion of olden times; and, finally, see that despatch of weal or woe which heaven's lightning, made to drudge, sends from man to man,—and bold will be the sceptic who disbelieves in these ameliorations of this age, prolific of practical benefits. Acknowledging, therefore, the existence of the superabundance in everything which can promote the comfort and happiness of mankind, is its distribution directed to the reward of those who “toil and spin?” In every age of the world rich and poor have existed; but the latter, in modern times, have diminished in proportion to the visible increase of the former; and when nature and art are in beneficial alliance,

increasing the stores of material comforts, these being produced beyond the possible consumption of the affluent, the surplus can only be absorbed by those whose reasonable wants need and deserve to be supplied; and therefore the rich, who have always had the means of procuring enough, and requiring little of the increase, the masses of mankind, earning wages by their labour, are in reality the great buyers and consumers of the bounties which their labour provides. In days of yore, when manufacturers had no existence here, the rich procured their foreign luxuries by unholy traffic, and Britain's children were stolen, and sold to bondage; yet then, as now, the wise and beautiful were amongst the daughters of our race, and from the expatriated of these there sprang a queen who graced the throne of the great Constantine; but in these better days, no tender ties are severed here to procure wares which now honest labour buys. Later in the progress of early traffic, our nobles obtained their Genoa velvets and their Damascus swords by the exchange of that corn which their estates grew, but which their hungry dependants could have devoured; though now neither feudal nor fiscal violence need disturb the self-adjusting commerce of nations, nor the laws of exchange to interfere with the relative values of those commodities which men give and take from their fellow-men.

With these facts, illustrative of the power, utility, benefit, and enlightening influences of trade and commerce, may not the conclusion be sanctioned that industry and exchange are among the true auxiliaries of civilisation and comfort. When, therefore, we see our globe girt with the intelligence which intercourse diffuses; when the soils and climates of the earth are devoted to the production of materials which are indispensable to the industry and comfort of mankind; when genius and talent, guided by philosophy, prepare for the most effective application to useful purposes those materials; and when patient and enduring labour at home manipulates the gifts of nature grown in distant lands,—can the good and practical results of man's exertions be otherwise than beneficial to his fellows of every country; but when the telegraph, steamer, and mechanical wonders are rendered subservient to the benefit of man, no other than grateful

homage to the ever present, though invisible, power which sustains the universe can animate those who would still advance and elevate the physical and intellectual condition of their species.

On the recent visit of our Sovereign to her loyal town of Leeds, the progress of our country and the pecuniary and accumulative prospects of commerce were referred to, and in those visions of brighter days and developments which were enunciated, may the gladdening aspirations predominate, that moral and mental endowments and attainments shall never be subordinate to mere material acquisitions. And may the British Association, in its migrations, scatter the seeds of progressive philosophy, aiding by its wisdom, correcting by its knowledge, and encouraging improvement by its discerning approbation, till the light of truth banish the darkness of error and ignorance ; and thus may an enduring alliance of the advantages of science be cemented with the practical benefits of trade and commerce.

